

# THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal  
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



**Confession as Self-Dramatization: I Confess, Therefore I Am**  
By Meera Tamaya

**The Devil Dog**  
Fiction by Celia Montgomery

**Poetry**  
By Abbot Cutler

**Artwork**  
By Greg Scheckler

**Inequities in Higher Education: The Experiences of State College  
and Little Ivy Students**  
By Maynard Seider

**Radical Surgery**  
Book Review by William Montgomery

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On the cover:

Graphite study by Greg Scheckler

## *Editor's File*

This issue reflects once more the diverse range of thinking and writing contained in *The Mind's Eye*. Meera Tamaya's engaging piece, "Confession as Self-Dramatization: I Confess, Therefore I Am," explores an original subject with a combination of meticulous research and animated prose. Meera's article is the recipient of the 2001 MCLA Faculty Lecture Series Award, which carries with it the opportunity for publication in *The Mind's Eye*. In fact, this journal was founded, in part, with the purpose of publishing articles from the Faculty Lecture Series, the winners as well as others submitted for the competition. Over the years, many essays from the series have appeared in these pages; they have covered a number of subjects: from the theories of Charles Darwin and John Dewey to a discussion of literature and cyberspace; from a revealing account of Robert Penn Warren's writing habits to a psychological analysis of Hamlet. This issue also features Maynard Seider's "Inequities in Higher Education: The Experiences of State College and Little Ivy Students." In our inaugural issue (Fall 1997), Maynard contributed an article based on his study of the 1970 electrical workers' strike at the R. C. Sprague Company in North Adams. Maynard, too, was encouraged to complete both of these articles by the incentive of the Faculty Lecture Series and the subsequent opportunity to publish in *The Mind's Eye*.

While these well-crafted and -researched articles explore ideas and discuss issues in a reflective and incisive manner, they are not necessarily ones that would suit the specialized niche of a journal dedicated to a particular disciplinary focus. Rather, they are designed to express opinions and insights for a more general liberal arts audience. It is our hope to encourage more such writing from our faculty and readers, whether born out of the competition of the Faculty Lecture Series or the need to write and share informed opinion.

Of course, *The Mind's Eye* also features other types of writing, as well as visual expression, and this issue is no exception. Celia Montgomery entertains us with her hilarious short story "The Devil Dog." Greg Scheckler provides a visual episode with five graphite drawings of landscapes. Bill Montgomery's "Radical Surgery" reviews *The Breast Cancer Wars*, and Abbot Cutler's poetry complements as well as completes the issue. As our pages celebrate these accomplishments, we continue to expand the journal's readership and distribution. Thanks to your help and support, *The Mind's Eye* is becoming a journal of regional distinction with a growing national audience.

Tony Gengarely, *Managing Editor*

# Confession as Self-Dramatization: I Confess, Therefore I Am

BY MEERA TAMAYA

You really could have heard the proverbial pin drop. The speech was riveting. The speaker, a student in my speech class, had the total unblinking attention of his listeners. He was describing in graphic detail how he had slammed the car door repeatedly against the head of a knife-wielding young man until he collapsed and died in a bloody heap. The assailant was a neo-Nazi who had begun by taunting him, an Italian American, for keeping company with Afro-Americans.

The speech was meant to convince the class of the horrific consequences of racism. The student went on to describe his conviction for manslaughter, imprisonment and subsequent release. What mesmerized me and, I suspect, the rest of the class was that over and beyond his antiracist message, there was a confessional tone to his speech. Like the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's eponymous poem who collared a wedding guest to confess his sin of killing an albatross, this student felt the *need* to confess, beyond his ostensible task of making a persuasive speech. Did I detect a hint of bravado: I confess, therefore I am?

Born and raised a Hindu, I have always been fascinated and slightly envious of the Catholic practice of confession. The syntax of the ritual request for absolution, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned," almost implies that sinning is a necessary prelude to the blessing to follow.

The Catholic Church has a genius for understanding the human need to tell all, to release the pressure of guilt, egged on by the added bonus of a confirmation of God's love. The absolute confidentiality of the confessional (which even a court of law cannot break) facilitates the articulation of the darkest secrets. In the 1950s Hollywood movie *I Confess*, the acclaimed director Alfred Hitchcock dramatizes the predicament of a priest, played by Montgomery Clift, who refuses to reveal the confession of a murderer even at the risk of implicating himself.

This inviolability of confession holds true for other, more secular forms of confidentiality. A psychotherapist functions like a secular priest, listening with empathy, counseling and, above all, granting absolution of sorts: "It is not your fault you are violent, you learned it from your father," or "You are neurotic because your mother toilet-trained you too early." My lamentable facetiousness aside, unarguably, Catholic confession has the added advantage of being free of charge, a consideration not to be sneezed at, considering the rocketing cost (\$125 or more per hour) of a psychiatrist.

Then there is the status of confession in courts of law, often portrayed in cop movies and mystery fiction. If Miranda rights are not read before an arrest, any incriminating comment or confession is inadmissible in court. Even with this caveat, everybody is familiar with the tricks and intimidation cops use to extract a confession. The sordid bareness of the interview room, sleeplessness and fatigue, the good cop/bad cop routine, the real or implied threat of physical violence—all may, and often do, culminate in confessions true or false (I will have more to say about this later). Even the more vulgar talk shows, in which overfed, underdressed teenagers and their parents confess to highly imaginative violations of social and sexual mores, have confessional elements: a defiant mixture of contrition and bravado. *Mea culpa*, I am guilty, is a sort of music to the ears of both speaker and listener: It sounds a note of catharsis and binds both in a shared narrative.

In his wide-ranging study of confessional practice titled *Troubling Confessions: "Speaking Guilt in Law & Literature,"* Peter Brooks points out that when President Clinton was accused of lying under oath regarding Monica Lewinsky, it was not only the tabloids that bayed for the blood of confession—even the usually staid *New York Times's* (December 12, 1998) lead editorial was titled "Contribution Without Con-

fession" (Brooks 1). This insistence on Clinton's public verbal admission was not based on reason or logic: Thousands of pages of documentation already existed. What the public craved was Clinton's verbal admission. Indeed, when he finally caved in and confessed in general terms (as a lawyer by training, he was too astute to commit himself to details), it was before a gathering of church leaders. His confession was distinctly Protestant in form—made to a congregation of sorts and very public, as opposed to the private and confidential Catholic confession.

Confession clearly plays a varied and recurring role in American society. In this article I propose to explore the emotional dynamics of confession, with a particular focus on the assertion of subjectivity implicit in confession and the consequent potential for self-dramatization. I will base my arguments on relevant examples from literature, law and popular culture.

But first I would like to clarify what I mean by "subjectivity." I use the term in the primary sense defined by *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* as "consciousness of one's perceived state." The secondary meaning relevant for my purpose is "individuality, personality." The first-person-singular "I" often sums up the felt sense of one's individual, unique, affective response to the outside world. A crucial aspect of this felt inner sense of self is that it is not accessible to others during casual social intercourse. Indeed, according to Freud, it is often repressed and relegated to the unconscious, only to appear in dreams, art and neurotic symptoms. However, ritual and therapeutic occasions are also conducive to the articulation of the deeply subjective (42–43).

The second term in my inquiry—self-dramatization—implies that a confessional narrative is often structured like a minidrama. That is, though the core of confession involves the commission of a sin, a transgression or a crime, it is usually preceded by an explanatory account of how it was committed. This narrative reveals an internal conflict, or *psychomachia*, between good and evil impulses. The inherently dramatic nature of conflict, or *agon*, informs the basic structure of Western drama from its origins in classical Greece and Rome, through the liturgical and homiletic drama of the Middle Ages, to its apogee in Renaissance drama. Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of the Renaissance, used and developed the theatrical convention of the soliloquy to explore in depth both subjectivity and its dramatization. In the

following pages, I will cite passages from confessional literature, legal cases and popular culture to demonstrate my central thesis that confession provides a ritualized means of articulating subjectivity in the most dramatic of forms.

Since Catholic confession is the primary model for most confessional forms, it is necessary to examine the historic origins of confessional practice and examine its implications. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council called for the first time for an annual confession, which would absolve the penitent of sins and prepare his/her soul for the Last Judgment (Brooks 83). Penances and punishments had been public and communal until 1215; the Fourth Lateran Council made confession private and confidential. What is particularly significant is that annual confession was instituted along with two other cardinal tenets of Christian practice: the profession of dogma and the extirpation of heresy. Thus, the practice of confession was meant both to *console* and to *police*: "It offers articulation of hidden acts and thoughts in a form that reveals—perhaps in a sense creates—the inwardness of the person confessing, and allows the person's punishment, absolution, rehabilitation, reintegration" (Brooks 2).

By simultaneously instituting the practice of confession, and the profession of dogma and the extirpation of heresy, the Catholic Church established the importance of thoughts as well as deeds. That is, a devout Catholic had to be pure of thought as well as of action. By positing an inner life which had to conform to Church dogma, the Church, in a sense, officially recognized the existence of thoughts and feelings, which might be at variance with outward actions and, therefore, had to be rigorously examined and attested to. In other words, the intricacy of rules, regulations and strictures the Church created to constrain individual desires paradoxically confirmed the *power* of those desires. Indeed, according to Brooks, the Fourth Lateran Council granted official recognition to, and reckoned with, human subjectivity (9). Impure and heretical thoughts deserved a hearing, scrutiny and punishment just as much as actions did.

It is not surprising that in the long and honorable tradition of confessional literature, it is St. Augustine's *Confessions* that opens the flood-gates. Born in 354 in Algeria, trained as a rhetorician in the classical Roman school, the son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, it was Augustine who first recorded every tremor of his subjective life.

Written 13 years after his conversion to Christianity in Milan, Augustine's *Confessions* has a dual purpose: to praise God and to chart his own circuitous journey to the true faith. In spite of his rigorous rhetorical training, the *Confessions* is so rambling, so stream of consciousness in its ebb and flow and so lacking an organizing principle that the effect on the reader is that of eavesdropping into the innermost recesses of St. Augustine's heart. Indeed, torn between the demands of his strongly sensual and spiritual nature, beset by the hoary dualism between mind/matter and soul/body, Augustine locates God in the "inwardness," in the "secret spaces of the soul": "In seeking for you I followed not the intelligence of the mind, by which you willed that I should surpass the beasts, but the mind of flesh. But you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element in me" (43).

Augustine's *Confessions*, when not taken up with hairsplitting theological arguments against Manichaeans, Donatists and other assorted sects, is preoccupied with guilt over his concupiscence—he lived with a lowborn Carthaginian woman for 15 sexually sated years before he was persuaded to discard her and his only son for a wealthy woman who would help advance his ambitions. The chronic guilt he suffers over his lustfulness is more than compensated for by the pleasure he derives from it, and the honesty with which he records the latter is unintentionally comical: "But I was an unhappy young man, wretched as at the beginning of my adolescence when I prayed you for chastity and said: 'Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet'" (145).

Augustine's fascination with his interior drama may well have derived from his passionate love of the theater: "I was captivated by theatrical shows. They were full of representations of my own miseries and fueled my fire. . . . What is this but my amazing folly? For the more anyone is moved by these scenes, the less free he is from similar passions. . . . But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself" (35–36). Precisely. Indeed, what made me slog through the self-absorbed effusions of the *Confessions* was exactly what attracted Augustine to theatrical shows—the intimate drama of his affective self.

More than 1000 years after Augustine, James Joyce's gifts as a novelist enabled him to imagine the power dynamics of the Catholic confessional. In his autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the protagonist imagines what it would be like to become

a priest and listen to the penitent's most secret transgressions. The power of the priest to penetrate the secret spaces of the heart constitutes an erotics of confession:

He would know obscure things, hidden from others, from those who were conceived and born children of wrath. He would know the sins, the sinful longings and sinful thoughts and sinful acts, of others, hearing them murmured into his ears in the confessional under the shame of a darkened chapel by the lips of women and of girls. . . . He would hold his secret knowledge and secret power, being as sinless as the innocent. . . . (159)

What excites the adolescent narrator is the idea that as a priest he would have the power over confessants, especially over females, to elicit their most secret thoughts, which would otherwise be inaccessible to him. The priestly vocation attracts him by its implicit power over others' most secret selves. As Peter Brooks points out, "If knowledge is power, knowledge of secrets—of that which is consciously held back from knowledge—is the supreme and vertiginous power, offering the confessor a particular position of dominance in regard to the rest of humankind" (89).

From a psychological and moral perspective, a priest has immense, if unacknowledged, power over the confessant. He holds the key to the latter's innermost soul and, indeed, as part of his training, a priest receives elaborate instructions on how to elicit the truest, deepest secrets of the soul. This is one more similarity between the priest and his secular counterpart, the modern psychiatrist, who also undergoes training in therapeutic listening. While the priest's ear is attuned to the nuances of sin, the therapist tunes in to the silences and omissions, which speak loudly of repression. Freud's famous "talking cure," as Anna O, one of his patients, termed it, is the secular equivalent of the confessional (Breuer 50). A patient unburdens himself/herself, and the psychiatrist's task is to fill in the gaps of the narrative, to ferret out and bring to light the repressed contents of the unconscious. The priest, on the other hand, lends a sympathetic and encouraging ear as the penitent confesses to the sins s/he *knows* s/he has committed. Both the patient and the penitent are relieved of the burden of secrets and experience a catharsis.

The term *catharsis* was first used by Aristotle to describe the effects of Greek drama: "Tragedy, then, is the imitation of a good action . . . through pity and terror it achieves purgation (*catharsis*) of such emotions" (12). The Greek word *katharsis* has been variously translated as *purification* or *purgation*, but in common use it generally suggests the relief felt after an outpouring of emotion. The action of Greek tragedy usually involves violations of divine or state or kinship laws, the most famous of which is the taboo against incest. This became a cornerstone of Freudian theory known as the Oedipus complex, after the Theban king who inadvertently kills his father and marries his mother. Although his fate has been foreordained, and he has tried his best to escape it, Oedipus assumes responsibility for his crimes, and punishes himself by blinding and exiling himself. According to Freud, who based his theories as much on literature as on case studies, such transgressions are poetic expressions of universal desires—summed up, for example, in the folk perception that men marry women who resemble their mothers. It follows that the emotions simultaneously aroused and purged by tragedy are the result of the audience's empathetic identification with the suffering protagonist, in tacit acknowledgment of their common humanity.

In the central paradox of Christianity, *Felix Culpa*, the Fortunate or Happy Fall, Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience is punished by death. The promise of redemption by the shedding of the Son's blood that follows lurks not far beneath the ritual request "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." It is the capacity for sin, the fallibility of mortal flesh, that characterizes the human, and it is this very humanness which is redeemed by God's love and forgiveness—*Ego te absolvo*—after full confession. If the sinner has strayed beyond the pale of human society, repentance, confession and absolution reconcile and reintegrate the penitent into the Christian community; the straying sinner is once again part of the flock guided by the Good Shepherd. In 1969, the Second Vatican Council implicitly recognized this model when it changed the sacrament of confession to the sacrament of reconciliation. Indeed, in many churches the confessional box, with its assurance of anonymity, is no longer used; instead, the priest and the penitent sit facing each other, not unlike a patient and a psychiatrist.

A crucial human ingredient for the achievement of *catharsis*, or the emotional relief experienced by penitents, patients and the audience

of tragic drama is, of course, empathy. Unarguably, no dramatist has more successfully evoked empathetic identification with a wider range of characters, both villains and heroes, than Shakespeare has. His plays abound in a spectacular variety of characters who have attained iconic status, not only among the eggheads of academia but with fans of popular culture as well. The poetry-spouting Scottish serial killer Macbeth, the unfocused and suicidal Hamlet (the revenger in need of both Ritalin and Prozac), the hunchbacked King Richard III, who cackles with glee before every murder, the sadistic manipulator Iago, the illegitimate Edmund, who incites and watches the blinding of his father, all engage the audience's emotions and enlarge their understanding. How does Shakespeare manage this extraordinary feat? It is my contention that Shakespeare's development of the confessional soliloquy is a major element in eliciting audience empathy.

A soliloquy or monologue is a speech a *dramatis persona* makes either to himself or to the audience; it is the opposite of a dialogue, when two or more characters engage in verbal give-and-take. In classical Greek and Roman drama, soliloquies are usually expository speeches addressed to the audience, which convey background information in the form of introductory prologues. Renaissance drama, however, evolved from its immediate predecessor, medieval folk drama—mystery and morality plays—which were liturgical and homiletic in content, and acted out in churchyards, inn yards and market squares. Mystery plays celebrated key events in the liturgical calendar, from the Annunciation to the Resurrection. Morality plays allegorized the internal conflict or *psychomachia* between good and evil or angels and devils experienced by Mankind or Everyman. Most of the soliloquies in mystery and morality plays were addressed directly to the audience by the Devil or vice figure, who revealed his diabolic plots; and since by convention the protagonist could not hear these confessional speeches, there was an added element of *frisson* which heightened the impact of these allegorical plays and reinforced their didactic message (Skiffington 25–70; Spivack 15).

Besides the theatrical provenance of the soliloquy, it is relevant to recall that Shakespeare lived (1545–1616) during a time when England's transition from Catholicism to Protestantism was anything but smooth; indeed, it was rife with controversy and turmoil. Eliza-

beth I, under whose reign Shakespeare wrote most of his plays, chose to follow a more moderate course than her father, Henry VIII (whose defiance of the Pope over his divorce precipitated the break with the Catholic Church), and his daughter Mary Tudor, who, married to the Spanish king, tried to reestablish the supremacy of the Catholic Church through violent means. Prudently less fanatical than either her father or her stepsister, and more interested in her own survival as queen, Elizabeth did not encourage the persecution, the burnings at the stake and the torture of heretics that her predecessors had pursued so relentlessly. Nevertheless, she was the head of the Church of England, and Catholics, while substantial in number, were always under threat. However, the Reformed Church retained some elements of the old religion. Instead of private confessions, the zeal of Calvin, Knox and their followers made a public accounting of one's sins, confessional in tone, very popular (Clinton's admission of guilt before a gathering of church leaders may be seen as a relic of this practice). Thus, it is entirely possible that Shakespeare, the canny craftsman that he was, drew upon both the private Catholic and the public Protestant confessional forms for his sophisticated use of soliloquies.

In general, Shakespearean villains, descendants of medieval satanic and vice figures, confess their motivations and their Machiavellian stratagems in soliloquies to the audience, while the protagonists reveal their inner conflicts and ambivalence, thereby enlisting audience sympathy. Since Shakespeare uses soliloquies in ways too numerous to make a comprehensive survey within the scope of an article, I will focus here on the few most significant of the self-dramatizing, confessional soliloquies.

I will begin with the final speech addressed directly to the audience in the last play written by Shakespeare, considered by many scholars as Shakespeare's own farewell to the audience. In *The Tempest*, Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, well versed in the arts of magic, creates a storm and stages some punitive theatrical shows to intimidate his enemies. At the end of the play, however, Prospero decides that "the rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance" (5.1.27-28), forgives everyone and renounces his magical powers. In the epilogue, he appeals to the audience to set him free. Since he stages theatrical displays, he is considered an artist figure, a stand-in and a mouth-

piece for Shakespeare himself. Hence, Prospero's farewell speech may well have voiced Shakespeare's own feelings about his impending retirement:

... Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue 13–20)

Having renounced both secular and magical powers, Prospero adopts Christian vocabulary and concepts in his final speech. Prospero's faith that the power of prayer "frees all faults" is at the core of Catholic dogma, and it is particularly relevant to my argument that Prospero casts himself as a penitent before a priestly audience that has the power to grant him absolution: "As you from crimes would pardon'd be,/Let your indulgence set me free." Prospero's use of religious terms—*pardon, indulgence, prayer, mercy*—reinforces the confessional aspects of his farewell speech. It is interesting to recall that one of Martin Luther's chief complaints against the Catholic Church was the sale of indulgences—pardons sold by a venal clergy. The power of a theatrical audience to boo or applaud a play becomes analogous to mercy granted or withheld. Thus, Prospero and the audience, like confessor and confessant, share a very human narrative of sin, suffering and redemption.

Shakespeare's villains, unlike his heroes, indulge in confessional soliloquies to brag about their superiority over the usual run of law-abiding humanity. Richard III is one of the more self-dramatizing Machiavelli in the Shakespearean canon and when, in the opening soliloquy, he explains the roots of his psychosis, he instantly engages the audience's sympathy and, by implication, its psychological collusion in his Machiavellian schemes. Like a talk-show participant, Richard blames it all on his poor self-esteem:

Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
And that so lamely and unfashionable  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,  
 Have no delight to pass away the time,  
 Unless to see my shadow in the sun  
 And descant on mine own deformity.  
 And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover  
 To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
 I am determined to prove a villain. . . . (1.i.20–30)

Richard, poor chap, knows he cannot count on physical perfection to seduce a woman; he has to rely on smooth talk. And he does: With incredible rhetorical skill, he woos and wins the widow of the man he has just murdered.

*Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner:* To understand all is to forgive all. Shakespeare's portrayal of villains is so psychologically plausible that we are made to understand the social roots of their evil. Edmund, the illegitimate son in *King Lear*, is one of the more spectacular villains in Shakespearean drama: He conspires against his elder brother, appropriates his inheritance, incites the blinding of his father and, finally, orders the execution of the saintly Cordelia. What humanizes and makes Edmund a charismatic character is his brilliantly articulated, entirely legitimate sense of grievance.

His psychotic resentment is rooted in England's infamous laws of primogeniture, which mandate that the entire estate is inherited by the eldest son, while the younger sons are left to fend for themselves (England has a long tradition of sending younger sons and convicts to its colonial outposts—Australia is a prime example). In Edmund's case, not only is he a younger son but he is illegitimate and, therefore, he has no place in society and no rights whatever. For all legal purposes, he is invisible: He does not exist. His soliloquy foreshadows a Darwinian view of nature as a struggle for survival, a view also anticipated by Hobbes, in *The Leviathan*.

Here is the concluding portion of Edmund's soliloquy:

... Why brand they us  
 With base? with baseness? bastardy? base?  
 Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take  
 More composition, and fierce quality,  
 Than doth within a dull, stale, tired bed  
 Go to th' creating a whole tribe of fops,

Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well then,  
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.  
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund  
As to th' legitimate. . . . If this letter speed  
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base  
Shall [top] th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper:  
Now, gods, stand up for bastards! (1.ii.9–22)

Edmund's soliloquy makes a brilliant argument against laws and proscriptions, especially British laws of inheritance. With superb wit, he imagines the energy and stealth required to commit adultery: the strength of desire needed to sneak *out* of his wife's and *into* his mistress' bed. A bastard conceived in such circumstances is likely to be a splendid specimen, while a legitimate child conceived between a yawn and a snore ("Got, 'tween asleep and wake") is bound to be a weakling. Nature's struggle for survival ensures the triumph of the strong bastard son, because nature knows no morality; it is amoral. By anchoring Edmund's villainy in social injustice, Shakespeare makes the audience understand the seeds of murderous resentment. We might safely say that Shakespeare was a social constructionist before his time. Of course, by this time, it should be clear that Shakespeare's insights anticipate those of Freud, Marx and Darwin and, what is more, he is a lot less verbose, and far more entertaining.

Shakespeare's protagonists are given to uttering inspired poetry in their confessional soliloquies. The hyperambitious Macbeth would be as driven and one-dimensional as the former CEO of G.E., Jack Welch, also known as Neutron Jack for his ruthlessness (Welch 181) if Shakespeare had not given him lines of singular beauty which attest to a troubled conscience and, hence, to a complex consciousness. Hamlet, the most introspective of Shakespearean heroes, has the most number—seven in all—of soliloquies in the entire canon. Since his soliloquies cover a wide range of issues, I will confine myself to a few lines from his first extended soliloquy, in which he reveals that he is flirting with the idea of suicide—a mortal sin and, hence, the most confessional in tone:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!  
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd

His canon 'gainst [self-]slaughter! O God, God,  
How [weary], stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. (1.ii.129–137)

Even if we have never been diagnosed with clinical depression, surely an aspect of being human is the experience of depression, even if only as a passing phase. What Shakespeare has done in these lines is articulate the precise stages and details of suicidal depression, beginning with the physical heaviness ("too too sallied flesh"), lethargy, even inertness, which many experience as an inability to get out of bed, followed by the suicidal wish that the body would "melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew." As a Catholic (his murdered father's ghost bemoans the fact that he was dispatched without last rites) returned from the university in Wittenberg (made famous by Luther), Hamlet is agonizingly aware that "self-slaughter" is a mortal sin. His sense of utter hopelessness is captured by the enervating rhythms of "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable/Seem to me all the uses of this world," followed by the projection of his nihilist view on the whole world, which turns into, in Hamlet's jaundiced imagination, "an unweeded garden." When I mentioned earlier that Shakespeare anticipated Freud, Marx and Darwin, I should have included the names of a few contemporary theorists of consciousness as well, such as Antonio Damasio, Daniel Dennett and Roger Penrose. For what Shakespeare has captured in Hamlet's soliloquies is the ebb and flow of consciousness—the ever-changing amalgam of sensory awareness, thoughts and feelings which forms the core of our subjectivity.

If Shakespeare's major characters are highly individualized through their confessional soliloquies, it was the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose *Confessions* stands as a literary monument to the new cult of solipsism also known as Romanticism. Rousseau announces in the opening paragraph that part of the reason for committing his life to paper with unabashed frankness is that he wants to proclaim to the world that he is unique, unlike anyone he knows:

But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I

may be no better, but at least I am different. . . . I have displayed myself as I was, as vile and despicable when my behavior was such, as good, generous, and noble when I was so. I have bared my secret soul as Thou thyself hast seen it. Eternal Being! So let the numberless legion of my fellow men gather round me, and hear my confessions. Let them groan at my depravities, and blush for my misdeeds. (17)

The key point in this opening salvo is Rousseau's determination to perform an emotional and mental striptease before his God as well as his readers. His confessions, meant to be read by "the numberless legion," will be utterly honest, he will expose the depths as well as the heights of his being. This verbal avalanche is meant to overwhelm the reader with a sense of Rousseau's uniqueness: "I am different."

In subsequent chapters, Rousseau reveals that his penchant for self-exposure is not merely verbal; it is literal as well. He describes how an early spanking aroused in him feelings of erotic excitement. Later, as an adolescent, in pursuit of his masochistic desires, he deliberately runs into a courtyard in Turin frequented by maidservants and bares his backside; he hopes to get caught and whipped soundly. He can think of no other way to gratify his desire for corporal punishment. Rousseau seems to take considerable pleasure in his self-degradation—it is, after all, further testimony to how different he is from the general run of humanity.

With Rousseau, confession has moved from the private and self-exculpatory to the public and self-proclamatory and, finally, to the self-dramatizing and self-assertive. Rousseau's ideas proved a major catalyst to the Romantic Movement in literature. In England, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron opened the floodgates to confessional poetry. Wordsworth wrote an epic poem (a genre which traditionally chronicles the adventures of national heroes like Odysseus and Achilles), titled *The Prelude*, with himself as subject. In the 20th century, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, to name only a few, made poetry out of their own family and personal neuroses.

So much for literary confessions. In the public, legal domain, the advances in biotechnology are increasingly discrediting confessional evidence. In an article titled "Cornered Minds, False Confessions," Jim Dwyer states:

Of all the causes of wrongful conviction, the false confession has to rank among the most astounding. Yet it has factored in the prosecution of 22 of those 98 cases [exonerated by DNA testing], according to Jane Siegal Greene, the executive director of the Innocence Project at the Benjamin N. Cardoza School of Law in New York, which has helped more than 50 convicted prisoners obtain their freedom through DNA testing.

*(The New York Times, December 9, 2001)*

People confess their guilt for all kinds of reasons, chief of which may be submission to police pressure as a means of gaining and riveting attention to oneself. It is my belief that while human basic needs for food, shelter, etc., have received extensive scrutiny, the very human/animal need for attention has not been adequately studied. It is instructive that Talmudic law prohibits the admissibility of confessions in courts of law. In his commentary, Maimonides cites confusion and self-destructiveness as two of the main reasons why it is a divine decree that no man should be convicted on his own admission (Brooks 72).

I began this article with the assumption that Western man is, in Michel Foucault's words, "a confessing animal" (Brooks 6). But watching Osama Bin Laden discussing the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, assuming that the tape is authentic, I could not help wondering why such a secretive and elusive man would allow himself to be taped in what amounts to a visual and auditory record of his self-incrimination. Perhaps the urge to confess is not limited to Western man; perhaps it is an expression of the universal desire, so well dramatized by Shakespearean villains, for attention, to be center stage at all costs. Perhaps videotaping provides an easy and irresistible technological means of self-dramatization and immortality, which seems to be a distinctive need of *Homo sapiens*.

If religion is, in its origins, a very human response to the foreknowledge and fear of death—the promise of life after death makes the latter endurable—then it is possible that the contemporary belief in the infallibility of technology has provided us with its own version of immortality. Ingrid Bergman will be forever young, eyes luminous with unshed tears, as she bids goodbye to Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*. Celebrities, criminals and even ordinary folk can record themselves in speech and action. Criminals, especially rapists and

pedophiles, often videotape themselves, thus providing incontrovertible incriminating confessions. The self-dramatizing confessional drive has, indeed, moved beyond the confessional, the court and the office, into nearly indestructible videotapes. With her customary acid wit, columnist Maureen Dowd terms the human need for admiring attention as Acquired Situational Narcissism. In her words, "If Narcissus came back today, he wouldn't be staring into the lake. He would be hitting the record button" (*The New York Times*, December 16, 2001).

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# Three Poems

BY ABBOT CUTLER

## HUMMING

I.

In a hallway somewhere a woman  
hums a song. It is a song  
against linoleum and loneliness and reams  
of paper, long corridors and copy machines.  
It is a song to ward off computer terminals  
and metal water fountains, a song  
against flimsy walls and desks in corners,  
cubicles and conference rooms. The woman  
hums her song and it is a song  
of dense low pines on the side  
of a mountain, of sand and pale grass  
just back from the ocean, of wet earth  
and garlic and well-worn maps.

II.

A man and a woman lie together  
beneath a window looking out  
over somnolent trucks hull to hull  
on a Sunday morning in the endless lot.  
For once it is quiet. No machine  
will make their life easier.  
They are talking, their bodies  
touching along the length of them.  
We cannot hear what they are saying.  
The sun falls across a chair

draped with clothes. For now  
there is nothing that they have to do.  
There is nothing that they don't have enough of.

In time, as the dark falls down  
between the buildings and the night  
seems full of small sadness,  
she will remember the way the light  
enters a room and standing again  
by the copy machine in a hallway  
she will begin to hum,  
to sing with closed lips,  
not saying the words, and the song  
will slide along the sheetrock walls,  
hover by the partitions, rub up  
against the mail chute, fade  
into the back stairwell and make its way  
down into the busy street long after,  
long after she's gone.

## GOING OUT

As if a door, crude, made  
from wood, gnarled and bruised,  
appeared in my house where no door  
had stood before, and I went through it  
and found the road and the will to say  
it doesn't matter . . . neither grief,  
nor love, nor anger, the way they looked  
at me, not even that the road  
disappeared and I was left  
among dark stones and a gray sky.

## POSSESSIONS

Last night's fire has left a perfect circle  
in black, gray and white, the spring brush  
a pile of ash to blow in the wind  
or wash in rain till there's nothing  
to say tree.

If there had been no house,  
or baking pans, or pile of  
magazines, or cedar chest  
filled with blankets; if  
the porcupine we found, its flesh  
still soft, had been killed by us  
and we'd skinned and cooked  
him and thrown the bones  
into the coals and then lay down  
to sleep, maybe in a hundred years  
or more someone would find  
blackened bits of bone  
and know that we were here.

# Artwork

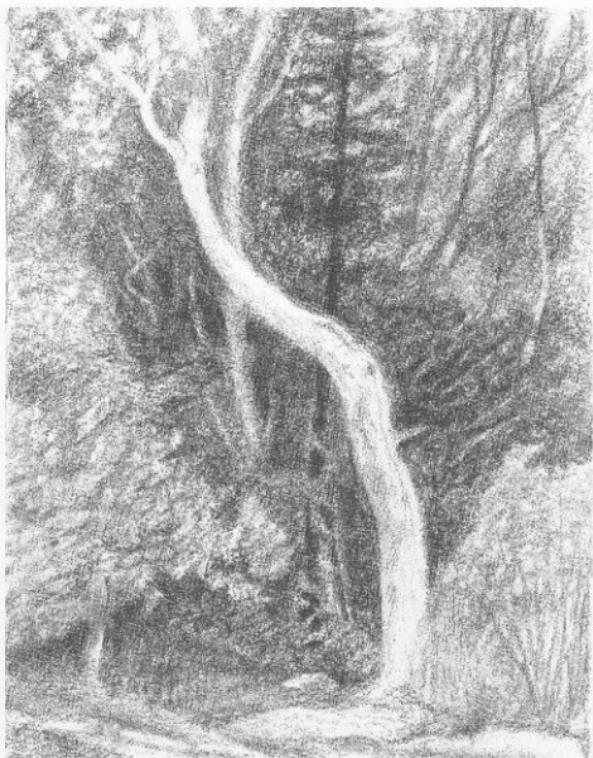
BY GREG SCHECKLER

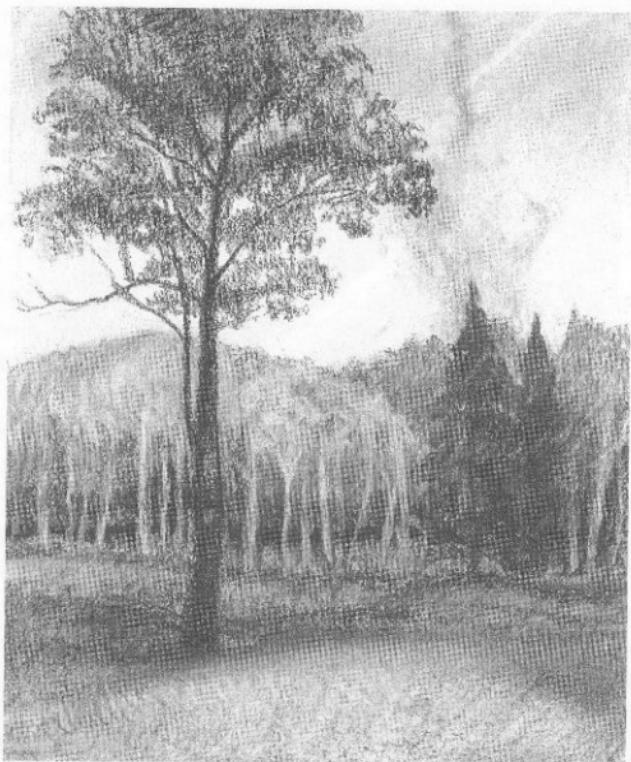
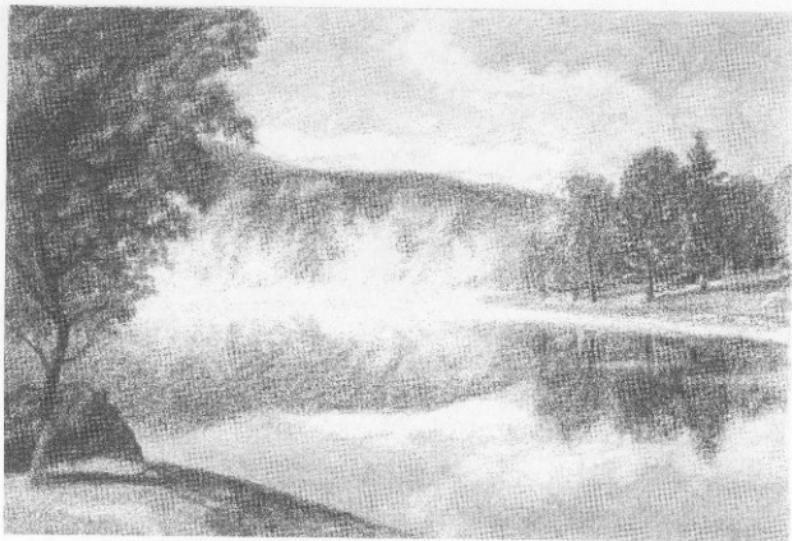
## Artist's Statement

This past summer I focused most of my creative efforts on representational landscape art. I enjoyed a two-month residency with North Adams' Contemporary Artists Center, most of which time I spent researching the woods and mountains of the Berkshires. In landscape art, the artist must balance imagination, memory and environment. In my opinion, a "balanced composition" is not only a matter of making static or dynamic visual counterweights and focal points but also a matter of the psychological necessity of matching invention with the environment. So for me, making artwork from observations of nature—whether abstract or representational—isn't simply about capturing the light or expressing oneself. Certainly, there is light and shade, and important viewpoints, and expressions. But I think in landscape art the artistic process ought to be more about recognizing, playing with and refining how all of these designs add up to good fictions.

Reproduced here is a selection of graphite studies that were made partially in the field and partially from the fieldwork and my imagination, when I was indoors. Unlike a photograph, which is a fairly brief exposure across a moment of time, a drawing is labor-intensive—less an exposure of one moment than a refined collection of physical responses to many different glances at the world. This attitude of a drawing or painting's being a collection of many moments is something I learned from the Hudson River painters, many of whose paintings clearly demonstrate many perspectives and times of day in one image, without resorting to a fractured cubism. I hope in the future to continue refining my landscape work until it is at least as strangely beautiful as the Hudson River painters' efforts.

Greg Scheckler





# The Devil Dog

BY CELIA MONTGOMERY

In an East Side apartment, not far from Gracie Mansion, where the mayor lives, on the 14th floor of the Harding Arms at the corner of East End Avenue and 82nd Street, lives a couple named George and Leonore.

They possess a Classic Six, which is a very special distinction in Manhattan. The Classic Six is located within a half block of the very best dry cleaner in Manhattan (Chow Yun, who also does excellent alterations). For most New Yorkers, these two privileges would guarantee happiness, but two years ago, when this story begins, George and Leonore were not happy at all. They were very lonely.

You see, around that time, George and Leonore's remarkable daughter, Albertine, moved to her own apartment many blocks away on the West Side. George and Leonore had tried to prevent Albertine's departure. Leonore had promised Albertine new drapes for her walk-in closet, and George had upgraded the cable TV, but Albertine was insistent.

"You know, Mother," she explained, "my shoes have absolutely blistered me by the time I reach the 6 train, and a cab is impossible in midtown, so I *need* an apartment closer to my office—besides, it will be such a lovely tax write-off for you and Daddy."

To reach Albertine's apartment, George and Leonore had to take the crosstown bus at 79th Street, and then transfer to the C train. When they got there, Albertine was frequently out, because she was a very busy girl.

George and Leonore tried to stay busy and sociable. George asked his doorman every morning how the weather seemed to him. Leonore joined a wine-tasting club. But these activities paled in comparison with Albertine's sparkling company.

One day, when George asked his doorman how the weather seemed to him, the doorman, whose name was Felipe, replied, "Cloudy, and not so dry, but I've got a puppy you could have."

At first, George thought he had misunderstood Felipe and that perhaps by "puppy," Felipe had meant to say "umbrella." But Felipe had not meant to say umbrella.

"It is a marvelous dog. Very, very beautiful. He is very smart, also."

George had never owned a dog before. He didn't think that dogs really liked apartments.

"Ah, but you've got a Classic Six," said Felipe, "plenty of room for a small dog!"

"Is it a very small dog?" asked George. "I'd have to speak to Leonore."

"He is very small and blond. He will match your furniture!" Leonore had a lovely blond bird's-eye maple hutch in the front hall. George thought for a moment. Leonore's birthday was Tuesday. She had always liked the dog at their friend Wilma's apartment, the one that slept all the time.

"Does it sleep much?"

Felipe paused for a moment. "I cannot remember," he replied. "His name is Ernesto."

The following Tuesday, George took Leonore to Le Bernardin for the prix fixe lunch, and then he took her to Queens, to Felipe's girlfriend's apartment, where they met Ernesto.

Ernesto was, as Felipe had promised, small and blond. He had a long lock of blond hair that hung over his right eye, and furry long ears that seemed larger than the rest of him. He had what looked like a ball in his mouth, but later it turned out to be a pair of black stockings.

Leonore thought Ernesto would indeed match her blond bird's-eye maple hutch. Also, she liked the name Ernesto. George and Leonore had found their first dog.

Ernesto did not mind leaving Felipe's girlfriend's apartment, but he did object to leaving the pair of stockings. Felipe's girlfriend did not seem to mind. "Just take him away!" she cried.

George and Leonore could not find a cab in that part of Queens, so they took Ernesto on the subway. Ernesto was very pleased to have such an exciting trip. There were many interesting things to bark at!

Ernesto was so impressed by East 82nd Street that he dropped Felipe's girlfriend's stockings. Many new dogs lived on East 82nd Street, and Ernesto was determined to leave a message for all of them. George had to pull hard on Ernesto's leash to get him into the Harding Arms. Finally, Leonore scooped him up. But she put him down when she saw the new thing in his mouth!

George made Ernesto give up the new thing.

Back in the Classic Six, Ernesto found many new things to interest him. There was George's domino collection, Leonore's new pair of Ferragamos, the delivery from Gristina's Grocery, the remote control to the television set and many other tempting toys.

George and Leonore hadn't realized that their possessions made such wonderful puppy toys. They tried to be amused. Leonore thought that perhaps Ernesto was hungry, but he didn't take much interest in the Nutri-Bits that George had purchased. He was far too involved with the brocade edging on the dining room curtains.

"No, no," said Leonore.

"Sit," said George. But Ernesto did not respond. He had just been distracted by George's cashmere scarf, which was hanging temptingly from the armchair.

Two weeks later, the Classic Six was much changed. George and Leonore could barely keep track of Ernesto's many alterations. They were too exhausted to put everything back in order. Ernesto rose promptly at six each morning, and George found that he needed to take Ernesto out by 6:30, or everyone would be sorry. Leonore learned to keep everything in high places. Her shoes were moved to the top of the refrigerator.

Ernesto was quite content. George and Leonore were very nice people. They did seem startled at times, but George was a wonderful walker. He was always so patient about waiting for Ernesto's "messages," and Leonore had such a sweet low voice. "No, no," and "Not the Hermès satchel!" sounded positively melodic. At the end of each day, when Ernesto finally became tired, he would hop into George and Leonore's bed and kiss them both very warmly.

George and Leonore were no longer lonely, but they were

confused. Ernesto seemed so sweet, and he was very pretty, but he was so difficult to manage! One afternoon, after Leonore discovered the remains of the salad spinner, she gave Ernesto a new nickname, "the Devil Dog."

One morning, George called his daughter at work.

"Hello?"

"Albertine! Where have you been?"

"I've been working, Dad. You can't imagine how crazy it is here!"

"Albertine, you must come home and meet the Devil Dog!"

"What kind of dog?"

The next weekend, Albertine came to visit. She was very surprised to see her parents' Classic Six. The Devil Dog had completely redecorated.

"What have you let this dog do to your apartment?" cried Albertine.

"It's a little better. You should have seen it yesterday," answered Leonore.

"There's no place to sit!"

"Just put a magazine down first."

"Are you two insane?"

"Of course not. We're just adjusting. Don't take your gloves off, honey; he'll eat them."

Albertine took a long look at the Devil Dog.

"You are coming home with me!" she exclaimed. And she scooped up Ernesto and hauled him out of the Classic Six. She carried him into the elevator, out of the Harding Arms, down East End Avenue and into a taxi.

The cabdriver did not like Ernesto's looks.

"Is he trained?" he asked Albertine.

"Not yet, but he *will* be!" said Albertine in a very deep, firm voice. Ernesto barked.

Albertine's apartment was not a Classic Six. It was not even a Classic Two. It was a Classic One with an alcove. At first, Ernesto thought it might contain some interesting toys, but Albertine did not let him touch anything.

"You are going to the *bathroom*," declared Albertine. The next thing Ernesto knew, he was being given a *bath*. He tried to run out, but Albertine's bathroom was too small. He had barely jumped from the bathtub when he almost landed in the toilet.

"You won't be smelling up *my* apartment," threatened Albertine.

When the bath was finished, Albertine dried Ernesto off and left him in the bathroom. She closed the door. Ernesto howled and howled, but Albertine did not open the door. He could hear her talking on the phone in the other room. "Oh, hi, Rudolf! No, I'm so sorry. Maybe another night? I have to train my parents' Devil Dog."

An hour passed. Ernesto could smell food on the other side of the door. He whimpered, but Albertine did not relent. Ernesto tried to chew on the soap. It tasted awful.

After several hours, Albertine approached the door. "Devil Dog? Are you ready for your first lesson?"

Ernesto threw himself at the door and yelped madly.

"I guess not. If you were ready for your lesson, you would be more polite. I'll come back later."

Ernesto could hear Albertine dialing the phone.

"Rudolf, I might have time for a quick drink in the neighborhood."

Ernesto began to cry.

After about an hour, Albertine returned to her apartment. "Devil Dog? Are you ready for your lesson?"

Ernesto was too tired and hungry to respond. Albertine opened the door. Ernesto jumped up.

"Sit!" said Albertine. Ernesto jumped again. Albertine closed the door again. She decided to watch a rerun of *The West Wing*.

Ernesto was in despair! Albertine was horrible! He missed George and Leonore terribly. Albertine's bathroom had no soft place to sit down. She had even taken all the towels away.

When her show was over, Albertine approached the door. "Devil Dog, are you ready to sit?"

Ernesto waited and sat.

One week later, Albertine returned to the Harding Arms. Felipe could barely believe his eyes! "Is that cocker spaniel Ernesto?"

"Ernesto," said Albertine, "shake hands with Felipe."

Ernesto raised a paw.

On the elevator, Albertine quickly taught Ernesto how to press button number 14. George and Leonore were waiting at the front door.

"Have you brought back our little devil?" asked Leonore.

Ernesto trotted up to greet his owners.

"Sit," said Albertine.

George gasped as Ernesto sat by the door. Then Ernesto showed George and Leonore all the things he had learned at Albertine's apartment. He sat. He rolled over. He fetched George's slippers, he barked when Leonore left the stove on, he took a shower by himself, he answered the buzzer by the front door, he dialed 911 if anyone fell down.

From that day on, Ernesto was a good dog! George and Leonore took him everywhere—to the park, to the dry cleaner's, even to Le Bernardin. Everywhere he went, he was admired by George and Leonore's acquaintances; and best of all, neither he nor George and Leonore were ever lonely. But Albertine did suffer some, since her parents no longer called her quite so frequently.

# Inequities in Higher Education: The Experiences of State College and Little Ivy Students

BY MAYNARD SEIDER

For a long time, I've wondered why the level of academic motivation among students at State College<sup>1</sup> wasn't higher. About five years ago, I examined the results of a questionnaire that our entering students filled out, the same one that first-year students throughout the country answered. I quickly skimmed the findings and was struck by one piece of data. For career aspirations, more of our male freshmen chose "police officer" than chose "lawyer." Not wanting to judge the comparative value of either occupation, or downplay the role of personal happiness in choosing a career, I wondered why more of the young men didn't choose a field that called for postgraduate education, which offered higher income, more prestige, greater access to power and the possibility of influencing public policy.

And that wasn't the case just for the males who were entering State College. The same data set indicated that the occupational outcomes anticipated by first-year female students reflected similar expectations as far as graduate education, income, prestige and power were concerned. The women, for example, much more frequently chose entry-level careers in the areas of education and the helping

<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym for a small state college in rural western Massachusetts. The data discussed below come from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey for 1996.

professions, bypassing the possibility of continuing their education to pursue advanced work or management positions in those two areas.

I reasoned that if an 18-year-old had already decided on an occupation that didn't demand graduate work or require an outstanding undergraduate record, then that decision might translate directly into a narrowing of the student's academic options and a lowering of the student's educational motivation. Why spend an extra hour in the library, why write a second or third draft of the paper, why come to office hours with questions on the reading, why try out new courses, possible new majors, if the goal already decided upon requires no more than a reasonably good record and a bachelor's degree?

I realized that to fully understand the lower motivation, I needed to learn more about the *precollege* experiences of State College students. Thus, I began a research project in which I interviewed students and analyzed their written educational autobiographies. I have collected data on nearly 100 State College students covering their elementary, middle and high school memories. To widen the scope of my research and to provide a comparative perspective, I have also interviewed 16 students attending two of the most prestigious private liberal arts colleges in the country, both located in the same geographical area as State College. In discussing these findings, I have conflated both of these schools, which are remarkably similar in student background, wealth of resources and internal dynamics, into one college, which I call Little Ivy.

## THE POWER OF SOCIAL CLASS

I begin with two major assumptions. First, social class is the elephant in America's living room, fully in evidence but often ignored; and, second, our schools add to the haze that keeps us from seeing the elephant. We are told, after all, that all of us, no matter our status at birth, can advance and make it in America if we work hard, plan for the future, take advantage of our educational opportunities and catch a little luck. In essence, that's the Horatio Alger story or the promise of the American Dream (Cuadraz).

Engendered by educational, political and media elites, this powerful belief finds support in the context of American individualism. It assumes that one's own merit and motivation can conquer all, regardless of one's position in the social structure. In fact, it often assumes

that structural inequities do not exist, that oppression has vanished. One leading mainstream historian of American education, Diane Ravitch, simply brushes off any other approach, and asks: "What does class analysis have to do with education when we live in a classless society?" (Macedo XIV)

Unlike Ravitch, I argue that we do, indeed, live in a class society and that our class position plays a major role in our life chances. Since Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis' pathbreaking *Schooling in Capitalist America*, an entire generation of economists, historians and sociologists have investigated the role of schooling in maintaining the structure of American society (Karen; Aronowitz). For these researchers, the concept of "social reproduction" refers to the process by which each social class tends to reproduce its next generation, or, as British ethnographer Paul Willis put it, "how working class kids get working class jobs." Beyond the most obvious economic inequities that characterize neighborhood public schools (Kozol), investigators have examined more subtle systems of tracking and hidden curriculums (MacLeod).<sup>2</sup>

Most of that research has focused on schooling from kindergarten through high school, though the college years hold no less importance. The class backgrounds and class-associated schooling that students bring with them into higher education help perpetuate the stark class inequalities we face, inequities that colleges and universities intensify.<sup>3</sup>

I begin by defining "class," probably the most contested concept in social science, and one subject to enormous ideological struggle in politics and popular culture. From my perspective, class (Zweig) is best understood by examining one's position relative to power in the society, particularly in the workplace. Thus, members of the upper class have high management or professional positions at work where they

<sup>2</sup> Tracking refers to the segregation of students in different sections of the same class, allegedly based on ability but often more associated with social class. The hidden curriculum refers to the traits valued in mainstream American schooling, such as a middle-class vocabulary, a particular speaking style and a gender-specific mode of behavior (Bernstein; Bourdieu and Passeron; Finn). For an analysis of these dynamics at work in a contemporary high school, see Brantlinger.

<sup>3</sup> Inequities due to sexism, racism and ageism also abound in higher education, but the too-often-unexamined issue of class is my focus here.

tell others what to do. They rank in the top one percent in the U.S. in their ownership of wealth and income and are generally highly educated, often with graduate and professional degrees, after receiving undergraduate degrees from elite private colleges. Members of the working class, whether white-, blue- or pink-collar, are supervised at work, have little wealth other than a car and perhaps a home and seem as likely to be a high school graduate as a college graduate, and if the latter, a graduate of a public institution. The kind of security that characterizes upper-class life does not exist for members of the working class: "To be in the working class is to be in a place of relative vulnerability—on the job, in the market, in politics and culture" (Zweig 13). Members of the middle class, in the middle of the power dynamic, may have some independence, have some supervisory duties, but may also be subject to the authority of others higher up on the chain of command. Thus, the middle class would include within it small business owners and supervisors, managers and professionals.

Inequities in higher education mirror those found in K-12 schooling, with the greatest resources, highest prestige and most significant connections to be found in the Ivy League and its smaller college counterparts (Domhoff), places where the children of the upper class and upper middle class predominate. Not surprisingly, working-class and poor college attendees are disproportionately found in underfunded community and state colleges. Those stark economic and social factors clearly contribute to social reproduction, but in this article I want to highlight two of the more subtle social and psychological factors that affect equity and mobility—"entitlement" and the "hidden injuries of class."

Entitlement (Coles) refers to a sense of confidence that children of the upper class learn, an easy acceptance of the knowledge that their present security and future status stand assured. Time and again, they receive cues from their parents, their extended family and their peers that they will make it. This is not to say that they don't have doubts. Of course they do. But their sense of self, of their merit and capability, and their experience in dealing with others outside their family, especially with authority figures such as doctors, lawyers, clergy and teachers, bring them a confidence in pursuing what they perceive as rightly theirs.

For children of the working class, a much different pattern emerges.

Their families' economic status and income insecurity leads to no sense of entitlement.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, their parents wish them the best and hope that they will move up in class, find less physically demanding work that offers them prestige and a higher standard of living. Working-class parents see schooling as the medium for their children to move up, to live out the American Dream. On the other hand, these same parents feel angry and jealous of those occupying higher class positions. They often question whether the more abstract work of the upper classes is, in fact, real work. While they encourage their children to climb the ladder to success, they show some contempt for those occupations that guarantee that success. While they support their children in their goal of mobility, they may also feel a sense of betrayal when their children reject their own occupations. While they tell their children to do what it takes to be upwardly mobile, they pressure their kids to stay close to home, at least in the same neighborhood. These contradictory demands produce "hidden injuries of class" (Sennett and Cobb) for the generation coming of age. Members of that generation feel the bind, damned if they do and damned if they don't. Lowering one's aspirations may well be a rational response to that conundrum.

## **SIX CASE STUDIES**

Let us examine the educational journeys of six college students, three of diverse class backgrounds who attend Little Ivy, and three from State College of roughly similar backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> Their stories, and the comparisons between them, help illustrate the power of class and particularly the concepts of "entitlement" and "the hidden injuries of class."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>As entitlement brings with it a strong sense of confidence, an absence of it suggests internal doubts, uncertainties and low self-esteem. See Herideen for a study of community-college students and self-esteem.

<sup>5</sup>For the most part, the words of the State College students come from written educational autobiographies and those of the Little Ivy students come from interviews. Thus, one can't easily compare the articulate nature of their responses, as the State College group had more time to think about, organize and work on their responses. (Among these case studies, there are two exceptions: Jason, from Little Ivy, but a student in my class, did write his educational autobiography, and Gina, from State College, wrote her educational autobiography and was also interviewed by me.)

<sup>6</sup>Zweigenhaft and Domhoff also make use of these two concepts in their analysis of the experiences of black working-class students in elite prep school environments.

Let me begin with Jason's story. A few years ago, Jason,<sup>7</sup> a student at Little Ivy, enrolled in an upper-level sociology class I was teaching at State College. Jason grew up in an upper-class Midwestern family that sent both him and his brother to New England prep schools. Jason was attentive, respectful of others and well aware of the sensitive issues we were discussing, as well as the social class differences within the classroom. He wrote exceptionally well, with style, content and critical analysis significantly better than what I was used to.

I had assigned an oral presentation toward the end of the semester, in which students had to summarize a chapter in the text and critically evaluate the author in five specific areas. State College students generally carry out such an assignment in a mechanical fashion, presenting the summary and then the analysis. They usually spend too much time in summary and too little in critical analysis. As Jason's classmates made their presentations, I listened and wrote comments to myself about their performances.

Since the students tended to make their presentations in a predictable manner, it was easy for me to follow their work and to grade them. I wrote up my evaluation for each of them and, at the last class of the semester, asked them to comment on what I had written. Jason had made a clear and interesting class presentation, but I had been disappointed in what I saw as its incompleteness. He ended with the summary but didn't carry out the critique. I spelled this out in my evaluation and graded him C minus.

In his self-evaluation, Jason responded in some detail. As I read it, I was stunned. Jason disagreed with my evaluation. In the past, other students had also disagreed, typically by complaining about my grading. Jason expressed something very different, something, in fact, that I had never received from a student before. He carefully explained *why* my grading was wrong, even suggesting that I hadn't listened well!

I did not make a list, a, b, c, d, e, and recite these "findings" monotonously. But if you had listened to my presentation, you would have realized that the full content of these "guidelines" was present.

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<sup>7</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, I have changed the names and other nonessential identifying characteristics of the students.

Jason proceeded to go through each of the guidelines, indicating how he not only covered them but critically dealt with each. He closed as follows:

I hope you can see now that I did in fact have the guidelines in mind when I prepared my presentation. I understand that you wanted a presentation, not a book report. I tried to make my talk interesting and avoid the choppiness created by following an outline. I urge you to reconsider my grade.

And he was right. I looked back over my notes and what he had written, and realized that he *had* integrated the critical points within the summary itself. I, who had been so accustomed to students' tacking on the points after the summary, had not noticed Jason's integrative style. Embarrassed, I recognized my mistake and wrote Jason a note, thanking him for his explanation and changing his grade.

Jason made his case in a straightforward manner, with evidence and logic. He displayed certitude, perhaps even bordering on arrogance: "If you had listened to my presentation, you would have realized that the full content of these 'guidelines' was present." Jason wrote this way not only because he was an excellent student and a bright young man but because of his own sense of entitlement.<sup>8</sup>

Working-class and lower-middle-class students tend to enroll at State College because of its low cost and its location, not far from home. For most students, a specific, desired academic program or an intellectual passion does not figure into the mix. Nor do most students expect more from the college than a bachelor's degree, a path to entry-level employment, or access to a later master's degree.

<sup>8</sup>During the semester that Jason attended my class, our interactions were friendly, both in and out of class. He e-mailed me once during the term to ask to be excused from that day's meeting, as another class's assignment had led him to a university library several hours away and it would be very difficult to get back in time. I responded, telling him that it would be an excused absence. After the course ended, I twice tried to reach Jason, once by e-mail and once by voice mail, as I wanted to talk with him further about my research. In neither case did he respond. I'm not sure why. He may have still been angry at my initial evaluation of his oral performance. Or, perhaps, now that he was finished with the course (he did receive an A), he didn't need me anymore. Or maybe he was too busy. Normally, when I contact one of my students, certainly twice, they do respond. Granted, Jason wasn't one of my students. In fact, maybe that was the point of his nonresponse.

In many ways, Mary is typical. She attended the community college in her hometown and then transferred to State College, just 40 minutes away. At State College, Mary maintained a B average but tended to be quiet in her classes, even small-sized ones. She looked ahead to a job in the human services, in the same geographical area as the college. Yet even toward the end of her senior year, Mary had not yet secured future employment.

Mary's mother, a single mom, always supported her academically, but in high school, Mary focused on her friends and after-school job, not her schoolwork.

I just went to school to see my friends and because I had to. My freshman year I was placed in a college prep. English class that I felt was too difficult for me. None of my close friends were in this class so I felt like I didn't belong there. I asked my guidance counselor to place me in an easier English class and she refused to do so. So in return I went out of my way to prove that it was too hard for me by purposely failing the class. . . . I had an attitude then. . . . I didn't do any work. I didn't read . . . so I ended up in summer school.

Mary once took a summer job at the factory where her mother worked. She recalls the women factory workers' relating to the college kids:

They used to tell us all the time . . . keep going to college, get good grades, because you don't want to be doing this for the rest of your life; and at the same time, they used to put [the boss] down, because he had a college education and he just sits in his office and pushes a pencil, and we're out here doing the work. At the same time, they try to tell us to get a college education so we don't have to have jobs like they did. It's kind of weird. They're sending us mixed signals. They're telling us to be like him, but then condemning him for what he's doing.

During her senior year in high school, Mary enrolled in a work-study program. She alternated between working in a paper factory and attending school, and since the "courses designed for this program were so easy I actually made the honor roll for the first time

since fifth grade." But Mary began to question the value of the program and the worth of the skills it might offer. She left the program after two months, finished school and tried a variety of part-time jobs after graduation.

There were really no full-time jobs that I was qualified for. This was probably the most significant reason that I decided to go to college. There was no way I was going to make five dollars an hour for the rest of my life. I knew that I had to gain some skills in order to make more money.

Many State College students, particularly first-generation<sup>9</sup> students, don't begin to think seriously of college until the very end of their high school career. By that time, their options are limited, as they haven't taken the right courses, know comparatively little about the college process and tend to view college as a necessary post-high-school experience to get a decent job.

Adolescents, no matter their class background, value peer relationships. When Jason left his Midwestern hometown and public school to attend prep school in New England, he joined a new circle of friends with similar class backgrounds, enormous cultural capital<sup>10</sup> and the same academic goals. His private school prepared him well, both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities. In stark contrast to the experiences that State College students have had with public school guidance counselors, what particularly stands out for Jason is the college preparation that he personally received:

Our college counselor probably spent an average of five hours in one-on-one counseling with each student. I can remember many extended visits with him, sorting through different issues surrounding my decisions. I was very interested in attending Little Ivy very early on, largely in part because my father attended, but the counselor would not just leave it at that. He insisted that I look at other schools . . . so I interviewed at about six or seven similar schools. . . . I remember the preparations for these visits were quite intense; we had

<sup>9</sup>First generation refers to the fact that their parents did not graduate from college. They will be the first generation in their family to do so.

<sup>10</sup>Cultural capital broadly refers to the knowledge, language skills and insights that are necessary to make it in a specific educational environment (Bourdieu and Passeron).

mock interviews, brainstormed about good questions to ask, and even had some etiquette seminars.

For many reasons, the path to the most elite liberal arts colleges proves to be much easier for children of the upper class, but a minority of working-class youngsters do get there. One in seven students at Little Ivy reported annual family income of less than \$40,000 (CIRP). An examination of the arduous path of a working-class student who made it to Little Ivy, with an economic background that corresponds to Mary's, will prove useful at this point.

Gail grew up with her younger sister and parents in rural Oregon in a small town dominated by its largest employer, a paper mill. Her father runs a winding machine at the mill and her mother takes in day-care children at home. Gail had always been an excellent student and her parents tried to widen her educational exposure with trips to the opera and summers at an academic camp. Her high school had no Advanced Placement (AP) courses and none of Gail's teachers ever mentioned a single liberal arts college to her. Her high school counselors simply encouraged the 25 percent of the class who went on to college to enroll in local community or state colleges.

Gail's mother made the Little Ivy connection for her after hearing a discussion of the *U.S. News & World Report* college rankings on a talk show. She had never heard of any of the top schools but immediately realized she wanted her daughter to enroll in one of them. She called the mother of one of Gail's friends and soon Gail and two other students had formed a study group. They combined resources to buy college research books and to study for the SAT exams. Gail remembers her mother's going through the Fiske college guide and ripping out all the pages with five-star academic schools and saying, "You may apply to schools from this list. Choose eight to visit and five to apply to." During the spring of her junior year, Gail went on a college tour:

That was a big deal because my family never takes trips. It was just nice, being with my dad. It was a huge expense, huge sacrifice for my family. We flew to Chicago, rented a car and drove everywhere—the Midwest, Maine, Massachusetts, New York.

The absence of much travel typifies the experiences of most working-class students. If they do travel, it tends to be to nearby states, and certainly not outside the United States.

Gail also benefited from a friendship she had developed with an older girl she met at summer camp, a relationship that her mother helped cultivate. Danyel, from a more affluent and formally educated family that lived out of town, liked Gail and gave her advice about college preparation. As Danyel helped mentor Gail, Gail aided the two other students in her local study group, both a year behind her in school.

As it turned out, Gail went on to do well at Little Ivy, but her transition there did not come easily. The other students were more urban, more sophisticated, had much more spending money and shared a vocabulary that seemed to her like a foreign language. As for her academic preparation,

I was very unprepared. I'd sit in class and have no idea what [the professor] was talking about. I'd try to read the books. It was like reading something in another language I had never studied before. . . . Before I came to Little Ivy I had never written a paper. . . . I never had a reading assignment because our school didn't have enough books for everyone so it wasn't fair to assign reading when you couldn't take the book home. My school didn't offer calculus. Everyone in my calculus class at Little Ivy had taken it in high school and so the professor went through it quickly. I should have dropped calculus. *It never occurred to me that you could drop a course* [emphasis added]. My mentality was, if you're doing poorly, you should try to do better.

During that first semester, Gail's professors treated her as if she simply weren't trying hard enough. And Gail didn't know that counselors were available. She learned how to ask her fellow students for advice, being careful to work her queries into the conversation so that her ignorance didn't show. She remembers one sociology class when she grew angry over the negative stereotypes her classmates had verbalized about people on welfare. In that case, her sympathetic professor had a long talk with her and, after learning about her background, became her mentor and supporter. Gradually, Gail felt more confident, her academic skills developed and her papers and grades improved.

For students with an upper-class lineage, the transition to Little Ivy goes more smoothly. Karen's father went to Exeter and Harvard, her

mother to Smith, and they both graduated from law school. Her father works for a private law firm and her mother serves as a federal judge.

Karen grew up in Washington, D.C., and attended the same Quaker private school from prekindergarten through high school. Sensitive to class issues and schooling, Karen states, "I want to send my kids to public schools, but public schools in D.C. are not excellent." As with other students from affluent backgrounds, Karen seems well aware of the choices to which her class position entitles her.

At her high school, the highly competitive parents of the students often clashed with the official values of the school. As Karen recalled,

The parents are all very focused on academics, so you have that plus the idea that you want everyone to be learning equally. They still struggle trying to mix the two things . . . [but] these Washington parents . . . are just so driven. Their kids are exact replicas of them being so driven, very focused. . . . They want the best teachers so they have started to make more AP classes and Honors classes.

A serious swimmer, Karen competed on the club level where swimmers have their goals set on the Olympics. In high school, she practiced nine times a week for a total of more than 23 hours. Besides the cost of pool time and instruction, such a rigorous sports schedule leaves little time for paid work after school and on weekends, a luxury that not all middle-class students and few working-class students could afford.

Besides her rigorous swimming schedule, Karen wrote for the student newspaper and volunteered at a housing project in an after-school program. At Little Ivy, she has competed on the swimming team and on crew. She likes the small-college atmosphere and the availability of her professors. When interviewed, she was majoring in psychology but was thinking about switching to economics and combining either subject with Spanish. She planned on studying in Spain the following semester.

Karen feels "at home" at Little Ivy, saying that "the kids here are very similar to kids that I have spent a lot of my life around." She would like Little Ivy to be more diverse; she says it is "too white, too upper-middle-class, but within that you still find so many great people." Note that Karen refers to many of her classmates as "upper-middle

class," not "upper-class," a common practice of students of objectively upper-class backgrounds. Also, while Karen does express some criticism of Little Ivy, she does appreciate what it has meant to her.

Thirty-five percent of Little Ivy students come from families with annual incomes of \$150,000 or more and more than 50 percent come from families with at least \$100,000 in annual income. Only 12.5 percent of State College families (CIRP) are in the \$100,000 category, about the same as American families nationwide (Marger 33). Educationally, twice as many Little Ivy parents have college degrees as State College parents and Little Ivy parents are five times more likely to possess a graduate degree than State College parents. More than 20 percent of Little Ivy fathers own businesses or are business executives; one in eight are lawyers; slightly more than ten percent are medical doctors or dentists; and four percent hold college teaching or administrative positions. About half as many Little Ivy mothers hold comparable positions.

Three generations of Ralph's family have grown up in the small city where State College is located. His mother went to business school and his dad received a bachelor's degree from State College. Ralph attended a neighborhood school in a poor and working-class district. In hindsight, he recalls the tracking that occurred in his elementary school, a phenomenon he says correlated with class background.

A good student, all As and Bs, Ralph first came across students from higher income groups in high school, when students from more affluent families from neighboring towns began to attend his regional school. Meanwhile, many of the elementary students from his neighborhood either dropped out or transferred to the regional vocational high school.

Ralph had always intended to go to college and, because of some very high family medical bills, had assumed he would attend State College. He met with his high school counselor only twice and "she never made any suggestions or offered any help or did anything to encourage or discourage me." He attributes her lack of interest to his near certainty that he would attend State College, but as "I look back, it may have been my neighborhood school background. Since there were only two boys left in my class from there, it was obvious that most of those students were not college bound."

While Ralph appreciated the academic preparation he received in

high school, he decried the extracurricular activities and other amenities his financially strapped school lacked. He played on the school's baseball team and traveled around the area, noticing the conditions in other schools:

I remember my first trip to South County High School. The interior of the school was very well decorated with plants and paintings. Their halls were carpeted, there were computer terminals in the hallways, and it was spotlessly cleaned. It reminded me more of a hotel than a school.

Ralph enrolled at State College as a finance major, a goal he had held for some time. He saved money by living at home, though he had considered attending the large state university 55 miles away.

While they had an excellent business program . . . I didn't think I would enjoy such a large institution. State College seemed to have an excellent business program, classes were small, the campus was compact and was for me very inexpensive. The only drawback is their very limited budget. Their facilities are in poor shape. . . . In most of the classrooms the shades or blinds don't work. There are tiles missing from the floors everywhere. There are many stained and missing ceiling tiles, and the science labs haven't been renovated since they were built. They have very little money for technical improvements, and they offer very little in the way of social activities.

Ralph's high school friends went to private colleges such as Colgate and Rochester Institute of Technology. He heard about their up-to-date equipment and facilities and expansive extracurricular activities. But Ralph was also savvy about the "networking opportunities" his friends enjoyed, what sociologists call "social capital."

Students at public colleges usually share a room and activities with students from similar class backgrounds. This limits their network of potential employers and contacts to people of the same social class. Students at private colleges are often sharing their rooms and activities with people who have more extensive social backgrounds, and more influential networks. For example, a student at State College might have a room-

mate whose parents are more likely to be working class, blue collar people with jobs as fireman, nurse, construction worker, small business owner. But the students at Little Ivy are apt to have a roommate whose parents are the CEO of General Motors, doctors or lawyers, etc. This allows them to build a better network of contacts when it comes time to find employment or continue their education. It is who they are rubbing elbows with more than the quality of education which allows them to move up in social status.

At the time that Ralph wrote these words, he was a junior and looked forward to a job in finance that would provide him with "a reasonable salary as well as security in the form of insurance, vacation and retirement benefits." While Ralph will have a white-collar job, unlike his grandfather and father, "I'm not sure I will be guaranteed any better of a lifestyle or earlier retirement than they had." He hones in on the reality of educational inflation, noting that his grandfather possessed a high school education, his dad an associate's degree when he became a supervisor and Ralph will soon hold a bachelor's degree. He wonders, "Will my children need a graduate degree to stay at this level? Is education inflating with the economy? I believe it is and therefore I don't really expect to live at a higher socioeconomic status than I do right now."

Ralph assesses the economic and social landscape in a clear and reasoned fashion. He shows no anger nor does he make any suggestions for change in his educational autobiography. Although asked to, he neglects to discuss his goals for the long-term future as well as his current political views. In avoiding the latter, Ralph appears to be making a statement similar to the vast majority of State College students, who engage in no political activity, except perhaps to vote. They seem alienated and cynical toward the political process, unable to imagine that group activity or social movements of any kind might change the status quo. In fact, in this regard, the State College students appear remarkably like their Little Ivy counterparts, who also seem disconnected from the political process and see the future in very individualistic terms.

Gina stands out as one of the best students I have observed at State College. An articulate writer and an energetic student, she plans to go to law school and eventually become a judge. An only child,

Gina grew up in a working-class family 40 miles from State College. Neither her mother, a waitress, nor her father, an automobile mechanic, attended college. Gina had always been an avid reader and an excellent student, and while her parents encouraged her to do well, they "never really talked to me about education."

Gina was tracked into the top classes in middle and high school and became friends with her peers in those classes. They came from middle-class and wealthier families, and in many cases grew up with parents who had graduated from college.

I can remember in my junior and senior year looking at colleges with my friends. We had guidance counselors, but in regards to college, they didn't really play much of a role. They . . . never gave me any direct input. . . . My parents were not very helpful. My father had little to say about college, except that I needed to go and I was going to go. My mother didn't understand really why I wanted to go and thought that the community college would be the best for me. It turned out that it would be the best for her. . . . She did not want me to go away. . . .

Gina applied to the community college and to State College and, despite her mother's protestations, to a leading private liberal arts college about 100 miles away. She received a \$5000 scholarship there for the first year, but her mother "was very angry" about her decision and "did everything she could to stand in my way." Gina's father, on the other hand, encouraged her, but in the end her mother simply refused to sign the financial-aid forms—and that was the end of it. Years later, Gina still feels anger toward her mother, knowing that she missed "a great opportunity educationally and careerwise."

Gina has maintained a 3.5 average throughout her college career while working about 30 hours a week.<sup>11</sup> She has earned enough to buy her own home and plans to commute to a regional law school

<sup>11</sup>Many State College students work significant numbers of hours while attending college, cutting down on the time available for extracurricular activities and for their own studies. During their senior year of high school, more than 60 percent of State College students worked more than ten hours a week, compared with about one-eighth of Little Ivy students. Fifty percent of the latter spent more than ten hours a week doing homework during their high school senior year, compared with only 13 percent of State College students (CIRP).

after graduation. Not surprisingly, Gina's mother opposes that decision, but Gina is independent enough now to go her own way.

## GINA AND JASON

Coincidentally, Gina enrolled in the same class that Jason took with me and they ended up in a small discussion group where students shared their educational autobiographies. Their poignant responses to each other's stories illustrate the power of ideology in the United States and, ultimately, how the American Dream finds wide acceptance.

Jason begins:

While [Gina's] parents were certainly aware of the virtues of [her] attending college, *Gina is fortunate to possess a great deal of self-motivation, and with this she was able to do very well in school and continue on to college* [emphasis added].

[But] it was very disheartening to hear how Gina's college plans panned out. When she was accepted to a good, out-of-state school, her mother did not let her attend. While Gina shrugged this off as "*not a big deal*," it was clear that she was very discouraged by this. While she is in a good job now and very close to her degree, it is clear that she would have liked a chance to go to the other school. *I was disturbed by this, and at the same time grateful that my parents are so supportive of my interests. It is interesting to imagine how social reproduction theorists would view Gina's experience, since she was not held back by any social institutions that they normally cite, but instead by her parents* [emphasis added].

In talking with her, I found myself much more aware of my relative affluence. As I told her about my prep school and answered her inquiry about the tuition there, I had a strange feeling come over me, sort of an ashamed feeling that I couldn't quite identify. It was frustrating to hear about how her hopes for college were tempered by her mother and *her family's financial situation* [emphasis added] while . . . I was able to attend the institutions I aspired to without either of these constraints.

While Jason's comments reveal a caring, sensitive individual, one can also view them as downplaying the power of class-based social institutions. In lauding Gina for her self-motivation, Jason seems to be focusing on that factor as the main reason for upward mobility along with the help of supportive parents. He ignores the fact that while she is doing well, it is at a state college; that her "good job" is secretarial; and that while she has goals of going to law school, it will be on a part-time basis at a regional school, one that will not give her access to significant mobility and power.

Gina, in the same interaction, also ignores key economic and social institutions. Instead, she stresses her own motivation and minimizes any disappointment she might have from opportunities' being unavailable to her. In comparing herself with Jason, Gina writes:

Although we came from very different backgrounds, with different opportunities, I do feel that we had made the best of what we had. . . . [W]ith strong willpower and the right encouragement, anyone can break through the barriers [of social reproduction]. I know that I was one of the exceptions. . . . Social reproduction can be overcome.

The ways in which Jason and Gina present their own biographies and comment on each other's help explain the power of social reproduction in the United States and the dominance of the individualistic, meritocratic ideology, internalized by young people of varying social classes. Gina can feel good for coming as far as she has (as, indeed, she should), and Jason can accept the good fortune of having supportive parents. Both of them, though, minimize the power of social and economic institutions that have impacted them.

### **SOCIAL CLASS, HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE**

Once the graduates leave State College and Little Ivy, they head out in vastly different directions. More than 80 percent of Little Ivy graduates will begin graduate or professional school within five years. Some will work at the top New York investment banking and consulting firms that frequent Little Ivy on recruitment missions. For those who take employment before graduate school, about two-thirds will be earning more than \$25,000 a year, and over a third more than \$35,000.

At Little Ivy, a well-staffed Career Counseling Center actively helps

students with internships and job interviews. With the Alumni Office, the center has developed a huge "network of loyalty," more than 6000 alumni who have pledged to advise their younger counterparts and to assist them with internships and postgraduate jobs. These alumni have helped the college build an endowment of more than one and a half billion dollars, one of the highest endowment totals per student in the nation. The college has a program of paid internships in which students can spend a summer virtually anywhere in the country, working in a field of their interest, often with an alum.

State College graduates, by contrast, usually start off in entry-level jobs in human services, education and business, though a fair number begin master's programs. State College networks tend to be much more localized and their alumni tend to be situated no higher than the middle-level positions of power. While internships prove to be popular for State College students, the vast majority of them are unpaid and the college offers no stipends.

As Ralph stated earlier, credential inflation is a fact of life, as more and more young people find themselves working harder and moving faster to end up in roughly the same place. More and more students are attending, and graduating from, college, yet those numbers exceed the jobs that one really needs a college degree to master. We live in a class stratified society, one whose structure has remained remarkably similar over the past century. Those in positions of power, those from the upper class, have a strong interest in maintaining this structure and in passing on their power to their children. It should not be surprising that the schools that they attend and subsidize should serve as institutions that perpetuate that structure.

The entitlement, the cultural capital, the private school, the corporate recruitment and the alumni network—all of these work to send many a Little Ivy student on to the road to power. Recently, one of the school's football stars summed up his sense of class solidarity immediately after leading his team to victory over its leading private liberal arts rival. After the opposing athletes shook hands at the end of the hard-fought game, he stated:

Most of the kids who come to these schools are from the same background. . . . It's a matter of mutual respect. You leave it on the field. We'll probably see these guys in life—on Wall Street.

The downturn in the economy since the second half of 2001 and the tightening labor market will, if anything, privilege Little Ivy graduates even more, while working against State College students. During a seminar on future job prospects, Little Ivy's director of career counseling noted the smaller number of recruiters on campus since September 11th, but still concluded that "we do not want to discourage students. If Little Ivy students cannot get jobs, I don't know who else can get jobs."

A labor market specialist from the Little Ivy faculty also commented:

In general, economic slowdowns hurt the least-educated and least well-off soonest and the most. From that perspective, Little Ivy students are likely to be somewhat more insulated than the general population from the economic downturn. I assume that a Little Ivy degree does help in the labor market, both because of its educational value and because of Little Ivy's extensive network of contacts. In addition, many Little Ivy students come from backgrounds that provide them career contacts. Given these advantages, Little Ivy students will most likely suffer less from a recession than students from other schools.

Just as most working-class people have seen their standard of living decline over the past quarter century (Zweig), access to higher education and mobility has also been constrained for their children since the mid-seventies. The great social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s opened more doors and career paths for racial minorities, women and working-class students, but the corporate counterattack, Reagan revolution and continuing political-corporate onslaught on social programs have taken their toll on public higher education. Higher education has become increasingly stratified. Escalating tuitions and fees, declining Federal and state grants, the privatization of the public sector and a diminution of need-based assistance from prestigious liberal arts colleges have meant that working-class kids are more and more concentrated in community colleges and financially strapped state colleges and universities, while the children of the managerial/professional class and the upper class are even more disproportionately found in elite private institutions.

Children of the working class know that they must move from

the manual working class to what sociologist John Alberti calls “the paperwork class” to secure a place in the postindustrial society. If they grab a credential, an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, from a public college or university, it may seem like upward mobility. And so working-class kids get paperwork and entry-level jobs under the command of the managerial class, supervised by the sons and daughters of the upper classes who attend elite colleges and universities. The working-class kids may blame themselves when they recognize the dead-end nature of their work and experience the difficulty of securing a stable position with a living wage. They may just end up angry and bitter and blame new immigrants and the poor for their relatively low status in life. Some, however, may also see themselves as new frontiersmen riding the entrepreneurial wave of the future, and may even advance their economic and social status.

If they do grab on to that wave—and hang on—they will more likely be the exception that proves the rule. More and more, the rule seems to be that they will grow to accept, however grudgingly, their postgraduate status. And why not? They have been steadily socialized—through a variety of academic, peer and family influences—from kindergarten through college to fill that role, and in early-21st-century America, their class of origin and light cultural capital simply enforce that ending.

What can we, as teachers, do? We need to remember the incredible potential that our students do have. But we also need to be fully cognizant of the processes of social reproduction that work to keep them in their place, and keep them from fully recognizing their potential. For them to grow to their fullest, they will have to question (if not rebel against) the system of social reproduction, inside and outside the academy. As teachers, we have an obligation to work with them, to ask the questions that enable them to evaluate their past—both individual and social—to make sense of their present and to raise questions about the status quo. Can we work with them, share our tools, our critical thinking, and be tolerant of their false starts? Can we help them understand their backgrounds, motivations and aspirations? Can we listen to them and learn from them as we recognize the reciprocity of learning?

Working with students on their own biographies, as they come to understand them in the context of their times and social institutions,

offers one step in that direction. If that collaboration works, our classrooms will be reinvigorated and our students will grow. If they begin to realize that their own biographies and journeys are significantly impacted by powerful economic and social institutions—if they make the link between their own “private troubles” and society’s “public issues” (Mills)—all else is possible. If we don’t help them, the ideological haze will continue to obscure the elephant in all of our living rooms.

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## Book Review

# Radical Surgery

*The Breast Cancer Wars: "Hope, Fear, and the Pursuit of a Cure in Twentieth-Century America"* by Barron H. Lerner  
New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001

BY WILLIAM MONTGOMERY

During much of the 20th century, the standard treatment for breast cancer was the radical mastectomy. Inspired by German microscopic studies suggesting that cancer first spread from the point of origin to neighboring tissues and through the lymphatic system, it was popularized in the United States during the early decades of the century by William Stewart Halsted. The procedure removed not only the breast and surrounding tissues but the lymph glands of the armpit and the underlying chest muscles, the *pectoralis major* and *pectoralis minor*. In *Breast Cancer Wars*, the physician and historian Barron Lerner examines the story of the Halsted procedure, as it came to be known, raising questions not only about the influence of science on medical procedure but also about the influence of patient preferences on the work of surgeons.

Initially, patient preference played little role in treatment decisions; surgeons ruled in the operating room, and patients accepted their decisions—a state of affairs that lasted until the 1970s. Lerner does not dwell on the issue, but, in fact, the broad authority he describes was relatively new in Halsted's day, the product of dramatic innovations in science and tightening social discipline related to ex-

panded industrialism. Until the late 19th century, the reputation and authority of physicians was low. Many American states did not even require that medical practitioners be licensed, with the result that medicine functioned more as a trade than as a profession. Practitioners with no degrees at all competed side by side with those with expensive European training, and patients shopped for what pleased them. As a consequence, physicians were forced to adjust their therapies to the market: The bleeding, purging and blistering so characteristic of early American medicine had died away as alternative practitioners, particularly the homeopaths, offered newly urbanized and educated Americans more agreeable cures. Despite the fact that medical statisticians in France were finding no value in the old treatments, their work seems to have had little to do with the change that took place in the United States. American textbooks and professional publications indicate that physicians clung stubbornly to the rationale for the ancient therapies; however, they dared not insist on them in practice (Rothstein; Warner).

Lerner's story of the Halsted procedure displays significant parallels to that earlier decline of a drastic therapeutic tradition. In the modern case, science did play a significant role, primarily through new standards of statistical practice and new knowledge about pathology. However, as in the 19th century, patient preferences also affected the outcome. Lerner is no relativist; he believes firmly in the importance of medical science, but he makes clear that science alone does not guide our treatment choices. At every step in the debate, value preferences influenced what Halsted, his followers and his critics tried to do.

From the first, there were significant concerns about the radical mastectomy. Loss of chest muscles left people with a hollow area in the chest and a loss of physical function. The destruction of the lymph glands led to swelling and persistent pain in the affected arm. In the 1920s, some physicians began to experiment with radiation therapy, sometimes in addition to a radical mastectomy, sometimes as an alternative. In France, the prestige of Marie Curie encouraged physicians to substitute radium implants for surgery. In Scotland, Robert McWhirter, who relied on radiation, could point to survival figures that rivaled those produced by surgeons using the Halsted procedure, though tissue damage from radiation took some of the bloom off his results.

Despite such claims, most American surgeons remained unimpressed by alternative therapies. Growing concerns about the safety of radiation made radical surgery seem safer, particularly in the light of a pathological tradition maintaining that cancer was a disease that spread locally. However, some surgeons began to suspect that the situation was more complicated. Even with the most extensive surgery, the disease still developed in many patients while others with less surgery survived quite nicely. Critics of radical surgery reasoned that the therapy was not really the primary key to survival: What really mattered more were the biological peculiarities of the disease.

Unfortunately, the available statistical studies did not really support the critics. The problem was their retrospective nature. Physicians looked back on patients they had treated in a particular way and totaled the successes and failures. However, good statistical theory called for a different procedure: A large number of patients should be assigned to alternative treatments on a purely random basis. The idea was not popular with anybody. Surgeons long accustomed to exercising authority felt that they understood the disease better than anyone else because they dealt with it daily in the examining room, the operating room and the pathological laboratory. They did not like to think about the uncertainties surrounding their work, and they frequently assured their patients that radical mastectomies would cure their disease. Furthermore, a physician owed patients the very best possible therapy. To deliberately employ an inferior therapy simply as part of an experiment seemed ethically improper. As one might expect, surgeons who believed in radical mastectomies were contemptuous of the whole idea of randomized trials, but surgeons who opposed radical surgery were equally contemptuous. George Crile, Jr., a leading opponent, was convinced by his own retrospective data that radical mastectomies were unnecessary, and he had no intention of putting his patients through such a procedure simply in order to score points with his opponents.

Of course, the justification for the Halsted procedure had never rested on statistics alone. Hence, the tide began to shift in the late 1960s, when two brothers, surgeon Bernard Fisher and pathologist Edwin Fisher, performed experiments showing that cancer was carried by the blood as well as the lymph. When a tumor metastasized, cancer cells were quickly transported all over the body. The Fishers'

research called into question the theoretical strategy behind radical mastectomies and highlighted a new approach, chemotherapy, that attacked the disease wherever it appeared in the body.

In the meantime, not only were the doctors changing but with the advent of popular feminism, the patients were changing, too. In 1954, a wealthy New York woman named Terese Lasser founded Reach to Recovery, an organization that assisted breast cancer patients in dealing with their illness and with the effects of radical mastectomies. The organization offered psychological support and practical advice about personal care, exercises, prostheses, clothing and marital relations. Some doctors were very suspicious of the organization, fearing that it would tend to supplant the physician as a patient's principal source of advice. Some hospitals even tried to exclude the organization; however, Reach for Recovery was so popular with patients that it soon gained wide acceptance. In practice, it soon did begin to do what conservative doctors feared—supplant them as advisors. Reach for Recovery did not initially oppose radical surgery, but it did insist that doctors pay more attention to what women wanted.

In the 1970s, a number of feminist writers published personal memoirs of their experience with cancer, each in its own way critical of medical procedures. Babette Rosmond, who rejected the conventional advice to have a radical mastectomy and eventually wound up getting a lumpectomy from Crile, wrote an account of the experience in which she emphasized how important it was for doctors to listen to patients and offer them a reasonable selection of options. Even more outspoken than Rosmond was Rose Kushner, a journalist who specialized in medical issues. When she got a breast lump, she had to approach 18 physicians before she found one willing to do the lumpectomy she wanted. One of her big targets was one-step mastectomies. The procedure at that time was for the surgeon to perform a biopsy on an anesthetized patient and, if it was positive, to proceed immediately to a radical mastectomy without consulting the patient. Kushner herself had insisted on being informed of the results of her biopsy before agreeing to surgery, and she campaigned vigorously for all breast cancer patients to receive this consideration. Kushner was not committed to lumpectomies as such; what she really wanted was choice.

In 1971, Bernard Fisher and Umberto Veronesi obtained a grant to conduct randomized clinical trials of breast cancer therapy. The

initial results indicated that radical mastectomies had no advantage over more limited surgery. The ten-year results appeared in 1985, showing identical survival rates for patients receiving radical mastectomies, simple mastectomies or simple mastectomies with radiation. In the same year, a different study showed that five-year survival rates for patients with lumpectomies were just as good as for those with radical mastectomies. Even before the final report, physicians were already making the shift to less extensive surgery. In the late 1970s, when First Lady Betty Ford had breast cancer, she received a radical mastectomy, but just a few years later, Nancy Reagan had more limited surgery. In 1979, Massachusetts passed legislation requiring that breast cancer patients receive a clear explanation of the therapeutic options available, and 16 other states soon followed suit. This did not mean that all patients started getting simple mastectomies or lumpectomies. The most common surgery was a modified operation in which lymph glands and perhaps one pectoral muscle were removed, thus providing a convenient compromise between statistical science on one hand and surgeons' and patients' desire for certainty on the other.

Even this adjustment reveals a tension between research results and personal concerns that affects what doctors do. We are accustomed to think that modern medicine is a triumph of scientific achievement, and so it frequently is. Nevertheless, in *Breast Cancer Wars*, Lerner describes a therapy more drastic than anything ever employed in early-19th-century medicine, a therapy almost universally adopted by the most highly regarded healers of modern surgery for reasons that seemed well grounded not only in laboratory research but in statistical outcomes, and yet a therapy that has widely lost its appeal among doctors and patients alike.

When doctors moved away from the Halsted procedure, they were not simply adopting a different therapy; they were accepting a different relationship with their patients. Traditional professional standards and privileges gave way to market demand, in this case with the blessing of science; but similar transformations have occurred in the very teeth of scientific opposition. (See, for example, the bitter debate over medical therapy that broke out in the 1980s when AIDS activists challenged FDA and NIH researchers over the role of randomized clinical trials in the testing of AIDS drugs. Suddenly, statistical science, which

had played such an innovative role in evaluation of cancer surgery, began to look like a bottleneck in the process of approving of new drugs, another constraint on the market [Epstein].) We have by no means reverted to the standards of the Jacksonian era, when some states rejected even the idea of medical licensing and patients reshaped the therapeutic landscape as they shopped among rival sects; but the parallels are unmistakable. At the very least, we have moved away from the unmistakable craft authority that prevailed in the 1950s. *Breast Cancer Wars* is more than a story about cancer treatment; it is a story about the persistent American debate concerning standards versus choice, security versus liberty. George Crile, Jr., and Rose Kushner may seem like unlikely agents of the market economy, but in the context of medical practice, that is exactly what they were.

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**William Montgomery** has taught interdisciplinary studies at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts since 1986. His primary interest is the history of the sciences. He has written several articles on the history of evolutionary thought and was an associate editor for the first three volumes of *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (Cambridge University Press, 1985–1987).

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